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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Tuesday, December 16, 1930.

(NOT FOR PUBLICATION)

Subject: "Christmas Tree Shopping." Information from the Forest Service,
U. S. D. A.

Once a year about this season I make a shopping trip that I enjoy more than all the others I make put together. Usually Betty Jane and Billy go with me and we select -- not Christmas presents -- no, indeed, -- but our Yuletide tree and all the greens to decorate our house. Betty Jane and Billy enjoy it as much as I do, for this trip is next best to going out in the woods, and cutting your own tree from the farm woodlot as I used to do when I was a child.

Uncle Ebenezer always tries to pretend that Christmas and the preparations for it are a dreadful bore to him but I notice that about this time of year he usually comes around and says:

"Have you shopped for the Christmas tree yet, Aunt Sammy? The children would be pretty disappointed, I suppose, if they didn't have one to dress up."

And I always reply, "Of course, they would, Uncle Ebenezer. I'm so glad you reminded me. I'll go down and choose one this very afternoon."

Then Uncle Ebenezer always looks pleased, but, just to keep me from knowing that he feels a bit sentimental about Christmas, goes off saying something about all these fixings for the children being an awful nuisance. But, I know that to Uncle Ebenezer, as well as to the children, Christmas would not seem like Christmas without a brightly-lighted and gift-laden tree standing in the corner of our living room. And some evergreen decorations over the mantel and doorways.

Well, that is what happened today and that is why my annual shopping tour is scheduled for this afternoon. I have invited all the children in the neighborhood and anyone else interested to join me.

The Christmas feeling has really gotten into Uncle Ebenezer's bones already. When we were talking about the tree and the greens to decorate the house at breakfast this morning he said, "You know, Aunt Sammy, I think the Christmas tree is one of our most beautiful customs. It deserves to be carried on always to bring joy to all the children of today and tomorrow."

Pretty good for Uncle Ebenezer, don't you think?

My friend in the Forest Service tells me, though, that this fine old Christmas tree custom may not last unless all of us step in and help preserve the trees. He says that the way we shop today may have a lot to do with whether children of the future have their Christmas trees. We can lend our influence to prevent harmful and careless cutting.

Did you know that from six to ten million of these small evergreens go into the Christmas market each year? Many of those used by the big Eastern cities come from the forests in New England and Canada. The supply for the Lake cities comes largely from Wisconsin, Michigan and Minnesota. The rest of the country depends on local trees for its supply and this may be helpful or harmful, depending on the way the cutting is done.

Yes, Matilda, say what you will about the Christmas spirit, lots of people are too greedy to remember about good will to men or to trees. A lot of destruction goes on at Christmas time. Public forests and farms every year suffer from Christmas tree cutters, especially from thefts by motorists along roadsides. Many fine trees are ruined by the thief who chops out the tops and never cares whether he spoils our trees or mars the scenic beauty of our highways. Even cemeteries and parks are robbed of their evergreens.

All of us who love trees and want to preserve the Christmas tree tradition should take a stand for the right kind of cutting. According to the Forest Service this will provide a plentiful supply for the Christmas trade both now and in the future. When cutting is correctly done only the surplus young growth, not needed for full stands of timber, is taken. In dense stands several thousand young saplings may exist on an acre of ground on which only a few hundred can ever mature. Christmas tree cutting, then, may actually aid tree culture.

The Forest Service also has some helpful suggestions for farmers who plan to sell the trees from their property. It urges them not to make heavy cuttings unless they are sure of a market. In past years uncounted thousands of fine trees have been consigned to the dump because the market was over supplied. All of us who love trees want to prevent a waste like this. Especially in the larger cities, farmers have to compete with large commercial shipments from Northern forests.

Several dealers in a town where I often visit at Christmas take orders for trees ahead of time and give them to those farmers who agree to cut only as a thinning operation. This brings the farmer extra cash and also leaves the woods in better shape for future use. The wise farmer leaves the most vigorous trees to grow into valuable timber and only thins where trees are overcrowded.

The inferior, stunted or crooked trees he cuts out will not, of course, make good Christmas trees but trimmings from them may be used for wreaths and other decorative greens.

This afternoon when I go shopping I am going to ask where the trees and greens came from to assure myself that they came from a legitimate source and let the dealer know that I for one am interested in conserving Christmas trees. Then I'll think of kind, size, shape and freshness before I make my choice.

Local trees are usually fresher and retain their leaves longer than those shipped from a distance. Firs and Spruces are the most popular trees for Christmas use with pines and cedars second best. Firs keep fresh longest and because of their long horizontally-spreading branches and deep green fragrant foliage, are ideal for Christmas use but the other varieties of ever-green are sometimes less expensive and more plentiful. A compact, closely grown tree looks more attractive and is easiest to decorate.

Then there is the matter of size. For a large room choose a tree about eight feet tall. That will be short enough for convenience and tall enough to make the star on top seem really up in the heavens to the children. For the small rooms most of us have in our modern homes, little trees are most suitable. Several of my friends are enjoying living Christmas trees which they can use indoors at this season and later plant outside. They go out and dig their little trees, root and all instead of cutting them as we used to and plant them in a big container, keeping them growing indoors until the Yuletide season is over.

Several of my friends are asking for information on Christmas confect-ions for the children and some others want a children's dinner menu. Tomorrow if you'll have your pencils ready, I'll talk about both these questions.

Wednesday: "Christmas Goodies for the Children."

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